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Filmī Gīt: A Survey of the Bollywood Film Song Genre

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ABSTRACT**Filmī Gīt: A Survey of the Bollywood Film Song Genre**

The current paper aims to provide a short overview of the Hindi film song genre, with a special emphasis on its history, genre conventions and linguistic style. Hindi films are probably the most important aspect of North Indian popular culture, with a cultural impact reaching not only the Hindi belt, but South Asian diasporas and international audiences as well. Hindi film songs are integral features of these movies, but they developed into a distinct genre as well. The following paper will address the historical evolution and the main characteristics of Hindi film songs in order to gain a deeper understanding of this influential but nevertheless understudied genre.

ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ**Filmī Gīt: a bollywoodi filmdalok**

A tanulmány rövid áttekintést kíván nyújtani a hindí filmdalok műfajának történetével, legfőbb műfaji és nyelvi jellemzőivel kapcsolatban. A hindí filmek feltehetőleg az észak-indiai populáris kultúra legfontosabb szeletét alkotják, kulturális hatásuk a hindí övezeten túl eléri az indiai diaszpóra tagjait és a nemzetközi közönséget is. A filmdalok nemcsak, hogy elengedhetetlen részét képezik ezeknek a filmeknek, de az évek múlásával sajátos műfajjá is váltak. A tanulmány a filmdal műfajának és jellemzőinek bemutatásával igyekszik közelebb kerülni ennek a befolyásos, ámde kevésbé kutatott területnek a megértéséhez.

JÚLIA SZIVÁK**FILMĪ GĪT: A SURVEY OF THE BOLLYWOOD FILM SONG GENRE****I. BOLLYWOOD FILM SONGS: CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE**

Cinema plays a role not to be underestimated in South Asian popular culture. It has a particularly widespread appeal since it can reach audiences regardless of their education, gender, economic situation, class or age, oftentimes also cutting through linguistic boundaries.¹ Several regional centers, such as the Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam and Bengali language film industries produce a large number of films, but undisputedly the most famous, rentable and influential among the South Asian film industries is Hindi cinema, termed “Bollywood” after Bombay, the central city of production. Hindi cinema has been enjoying unparalleled popularity since the appearance of film technology on the subcontinent. Hindi films have developed a variety of stylistic conventions which set them apart from the established European and North American film genres. One of these aspects is the distinctly South Asian way of using film music. Film songs are significant and very characteristic features of Bollywood films, to the extent that Hindi movies not containing the typical genre of film songs are traditionally considered “art films” regardless of their other features, and as such, usually fail to do well at the box office.² It is only a recent phenomenon that some mainstream “songless” Bollywood films, such as *Kahaani* (2012) or *Rajneeti* (2010) could be successful not only critically but in the commercial sense, too.

Mainstream Hindi films usually contain up to five or six song sequences, which in contrast to Hollywood movies do not serve as background score, but are usually source-connected and diegetic: the source of the music is represented on screen and the songs form part of the narrative. For the visual representation of these songs the Indian media has coined the term “picturization”, which encapsulates the visual and aural representation of a song in the context of the given movie.³ In the picturization, the actors

¹ DWYER 2010: 384.

² GOPAL-MOORTI 2008: 2.

³ BOOTH 2000: 143.

are shown as singing, dancing and oftentimes enacting the lyrics of the songs. Even though the impression is transmitted that the film stars themselves sing the songs they perform to, but in fact there is an established tradition of playback singing with the actors “lip-synching” the songs during the shooting. The lip-synching actors are most often placed among lush sets, spectacular costumes and are seen performing a complicated choreography, often in the middle of a dance troupe.⁴

Even though film songs are very important and much emphasized in Hindi films, Bollywood movies should still not be regarded as musicals as understood in the Western sense of the genre. There are several scholarly interpretations for the issue, but most authors argue that the main reasons why Bollywood films should not be regarded as musicals are that 1) Western genre categories should not be applied to Hindi films in general, because of the distinctly Indian tradition of genre mixing, which resulted in the concept of the *masala* film incorporating many genre traits⁵ in a single movie, making it impossible to easily determine its genre according to Western concepts; 2) most Hindi films contain song sequences regardless of their genre and the films do not reproduce the characteristics of the Western musical genre sufficiently. According to Rajinder Dudrah the most convincing argument in this respect is the narrative role played by Hindi film songs in the plot as opposed to the less integrated role of film music in Western musicals.⁶

Even though Hindi films cannot be separated from their song sequences, film music has had an independent life of its own to a certain extent. Apart from the ever-larger share of Western music on the Indian music sales market, three major Indian genres can be found on it: film, classical and folk music,⁷ with the fourth overlapping genre of devotional music. Among these, the genre most widely consumed is without any doubt film music. This is facilitated by the eclectic nature of film music, which can accommodate a variety of the newest music trends, while retaining certain characteristics of classical Indian and folk music, blending it into an exotic, innovative musical form, remaining very popular in India. In addition to this, the popularity of film music and the possibility to use song sequences as video clips⁸ make them apt media for the promotion of the films. Since the

⁴ DUDRAH 2006: 52.

⁵ Most *masala* films contain traits of the romantic, melodramatic, action, and comedy genres, but mix them in a way that considering them as either one of the categories would not be an accurate description.

⁶ DUDRAH 2006: 47, GOPAL-MOORTI 2008:2.

⁷ MORCOM 2008: 89.

⁸ This holds true even though the logic behind shooting film songs and Western video clips is still fundamentally different. In Indian cinema, the narrative of the film is set first and the song is tailored to fit

economic liberalization of the 1990s, alongside the previously established radio channels, a huge number of music television channels have appeared in India specializing in broadcasting Hindi film music. Internet and video sharing sites help making film songs easy to access for diasporas and international audiences as well.

II. THE HISTORY OF FILM SONGS

Music had already formed an integral part of Hindi films even before the appearance of sound pictures, as film technology had an early start in India, with the first Indian silent films produced in 1912⁹ already being screened with music accompanying them. This took the form of a live band of musicians present in the cinema hall, which was very similar to contemporary European and American practice, but in India it was also an established tradition that a special score was composed to accompany the film, and the band would travel for the screenings and perform the music accordingly.¹⁰

The first sound film to be produced was *Alam Ara* in 1930 and the featured seven songs set the example for the rest of Hindi films to come. Even though there were instances when filmmakers tried to include significantly higher numbers of film songs, such as the 1931 musical *Shirin–Farhad* with 42 or the 1932 movie *Indrasabha* with 69 songs, but these were rather sung dialogues than full-fledged musical numbers, and they failed to win the appreciation of audiences. There were films released without any songs as well, such as the 1937 movie *Naujawaan*, but as the audiences could not understand the reason behind this, a special trailer had to be added to the movie explaining the lack of song sequences.¹¹

Research traces the origins of the audience's expectations and the filmmaker's habits back to traditional forms of entertainment already present before the advent of film. The staging of the great Hindu epics by storytellers in villages and cities by popular regional theatres, such as the Bengali *jātrā*, the Marathi *naṭankī*, or the typical 19th century Bombay entertainment form of the *Pārsī* theatre, all included musical

into this context, while in Western music video clips there is an undisputed primacy of music and the video clip is set to the music (MORCOM 2008: 75).

⁹ MANUEL 1998:162

¹⁰ GOPAL–MOORTI 2008:20.

¹¹ GOPAL–MOORTI 2008:20, 2.

interludes.¹² *Pārsī* theatre is often cited as one of the most influential sources for all aspects of the evolving film culture. The *Pārsī* theatre performances usually comprised of melodramatic stories with song and dance sequences. These combined Western and Eastern theatre conventions and musical styles, leading to the emergence of a hybrid, inclusive style of entertainment, which can be viewed as a direct forerunner to the style of South Asian films as well.¹³

After the popularity of the first “all-talking, all-singing, all-dancing” pictures, the inclusion of film songs became the norm of filmmaking. Due to technical limitations, the sound and picture of film songs had to be shot simultaneously,¹⁴ which meant that the actors had to sing their songs themselves. Even though most often they did not perform full length songs, but rather intonations of prose, sung proverbs or folk songs adjusted to the film context, but this still meant that the actors had to be cast on the basis of their vocal skills.¹⁵ The fact that playback singing became a technical possibility in the 1940s was an innovation, which led to profound changes in the Hindi film industry. Afterwards actors were cast on the basis of their acting skills, and it did not matter if they could sing well or not.¹⁶ The emphasis shifted to their dancing abilities instead: since the actor was not bound by the microphone any longer, he could take part in the elaborate dance routines, which were earlier performed exclusively by a dance troupe. The category of the dancing star was born, and the dance form developed by the choreographers of the era could be best described as a fusion blending Indian classical and modern Western dances into a distinct form, very much corresponding to the fusion music.¹⁷ The musical style of the 1930s and the 1940s is most often termed “light classical music”, because the music directors, usually coming from a classical music background, preferred to borrow from the folk and classical music repertory, and incorporated them into film songs with slight changes in rhythm structures and instrumentation.¹⁸

¹² CIOLFI 2012: 389.

¹³ GOPAL–MOORTI 2008:19.

¹⁴ GOPAL–MOORTI 2008:20.

¹⁵ SKILLMAN 1986: 134.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that even though actors only perform to film songs, these songs are often remembered as songs of the particular actor instead of songs of the particular singer, so it is possible to find a huge number of “Shahrukh Khan songs” on video-sharing sites, even though he did not sing them. Actors often go on world tours to perform live shows of the songs picturized on them as well. This does not mean, however, that playback singers are not credited, but with the exception of a few high-profile playback singers, their popularity cannot match that of the actors.

¹⁷ GOPAL–MOORTI 2008: 25.

¹⁸ SKILLMAN 1986: 134.

The independence of India in 1947 brought significant changes in the film industry as well, as the new national government provided larger say to the Censor Board of India in film licensing, which resulted in stricter regulation on showing physical contact between the sexes on screen. Nevertheless, film songs were subject to milder rules and even though kissing and nudity were not allowed in either the main body of the film or the film songs, but songs could still represent a certain display of affection with suggestive body language and symbolic lyrics. The introduction of stricter censorship therefore further elevated the role of film songs in film production and the narrative of the film as well.¹⁹

As radio and broadcasting technology spread across the country, film songs started to circulate independently and achieved even more popularity. Much of the broadcast content comprised of film music to the extent that the national government found it worrying and took up the arduous task of reforming the popular taste. In 1952, the new Minister of Information and Broadcasting banned broadcasting film music on the All India Radio. He disapproved of the Western influenced film music and was concerned that it will turn the audience away from Indian classical music. In fact, the wider public have never been interested in Indian classical music in the first place, but when the radio started to air it instead of film music, the state radio station lost even the remnants of its popularity. Instead of getting familiar with their cultural heritage, the listeners tuned in to the radio stations of Goa and Ceylon which were not under the control of the Indian government and could air unlimited amount of film music.²⁰ The feud between the listeners and the government ended in 1957, and until the advent of cassette tapes, radio remained the major distribution tool for film songs.²¹

The 1960s and 1970s were very much affected by Anglo-American popular culture, not only in musical influences, such as instrumentation or beats, but oftentimes songs were right away plagiarized and lyrics translated into Hindi word for word from the English original. In addition to the American style disco sounds, Bollywood music directors also started to explore terrains of world music, incorporating African and American ethnic musical styles as mediated through American popular music.²²

¹⁹ TAYLOR 2002: 311.

²⁰ SKILLMAN 1986: 138, 140.

²¹ GOPAL-MOORTI 2008:14.

²² SKILLMAN 1986: 141.

The previously mentioned promotional role of film music became prominent with the economic liberalization and the technological development of the 1990s. Film songs were starting to get released in advance to the films, and in addition to trailers, these were also used for promotional purposes and were released individually as well.²³ The importance of film songs with regards to promotion is shown by the fact that even though the success of the soundtrack usually depends on the success of the film itself, in the case of some enormously popular film songs it has happened that only the success of these made an otherwise faltering film a box office hit. This happened in the case of the extremely suggestive song sequence *Colī ke pīche kyā hai* (“What’s inside my blouse?”) picturized on Madhuri Dixit, which ensured the success of the 1993 movie *Khal-Nayak*.²⁴

On the other hand, no matter how popular film songs may be, because of the lack of enforcement of anti-piracy laws, film song sales still do not produce enough income to be considered a serious funding option for film production. The situation remains unchanged even though film music remains the main source of popular music in India, as it is evident from the fact that about 80% of all music sales comes from film music.²⁵ In fact, film music has started to transgress its traditional boundaries as well, which is manifest in the variety of other entertainment forms based on film music, the spectrum of which is ranging from expensive international stage tours of film stars and playback singers, television singing and dancing competitions based on film music, to community *pūjās*, cultural festivals and family celebrations including film music.²⁶

The expansion of the realm of film music continued in the new millennium as well. The emergence of the new, urban middle classes, the interest of overseas diasporas in Indian popular culture made films distributed in large, urban multiplex cinemas both in India and abroad more rentable. Filmmakers therefore increasingly tend to take into consideration the preferences of young, urban, Westernized or Western audiences, who even though cannot fully associate with traditional Indian music, still prefer to retain some elements of the established film music style in order to satisfy the needs of their cultural nationalism, but at the same time wish to keep in touch with the newest music trends.²⁷ Films and especially film song sequences are often shot in foreign locations, and

²³ MORCOM 2008: 71.

²⁴ MORCOM 2008: 72.

²⁵ DUDRAH 2006: 53.

²⁶ BAKSHI-SARKAR 2015: 145.

²⁷ MANUEL 1998:168.

music directors ensure that the newest music trends are incorporated into their work, to keep the sound fresh and appealing to the young audiences.²⁸

An increasing amount of Western influence can be observed in the usage of film songs within the movies as well. In addition to the traditional lip-synched performance of a song, American type voice-over can be recognized as a new trend with the hero often no longer depicted as singing the song himself, but the music rather used in the form of a background score or the songs incorporated in the framework of party scenes.²⁹ There are often less songs featured in the main text of the film, too. Songs are ever more often performed during the roll of the end credits, and instead of featuring six original songs, the audio soundtracks often include three or four songs coupled with some remixes.³⁰

The role of the playback singers has also been in the process of change: the most successful among the playback artists now thrive to achieve celebrity status in their own right. This cannot match the fame of the actors of course, but the trends still signifies a certain amount of independence showing in the film music industry. The following passage will address these recent changes as well, but will mostly focus on the traditional narrative functions of film songs.

III. FILM SONG GENRES AND THEIR NARRATIVE ROLE

As we have already witnessed with regards to their role as popular music in India and their importance in the field of marketing and promotion, film song sequences can perform a variety of functions both within and outside the realm of the movies. Moving on to analyze their role within the context of the film, it is more than natural that the most basic function film songs have to be able to perform is that of entertainment. Research of movie-going habits has confirmed that song sequences do fulfill this expectation: especially before the era of widespread internet-access, many people have developed the selective movie-going habit of going to the cinema multiple times for the same show, only watching their favorite song sequence in it and leaving the cinema hall afterwards.³¹ Entire genres of film songs are built around the notion of pure entertainment, such as the

²⁸ BEASTER-JONES 2014:152.

²⁹ SARRAZIN 2008: 405.

³⁰ BEASTER-JONES 2014: 151.

³¹ BAKSHI-SARKAR 2015: 144.

genre of the vamp song or the item song. These songs are often inserted without any context with the performing “item girl” only making a cameo appearance in the song not connected to the storyline.

As opposed to this solely entertaining role, the majority of film songs serve various narrative functions in the film, which is often achieved through their ability to express emotions. Ever since the 1940s, song sequences have been serving as an “emotional outlet” for the heroes of the film by providing a terrain for the expression of comic relief, romantic sentiments or various messages reflecting traditional Indian values.³² Song sequences are often used to provide a break from the mundane everyday reality depicted in the film and lived by the audiences, and the songs can provide an alternative universe through their fanciful visual world. The unrealistic and glamorous nature of this alternative universe tempts many critics of Bollywood cinema to term it as “escapist”,³³ which is accurate in the sense that it is often rather an imaginary India which is represented in these song sequences. The world depicted in these songs is usually far removed from the actual lifestyle of the average audiences both in terms of economic and material possibilities and in emotional and social context.³⁴

Apart from providing a break from reality, song sequences can perform the exact opposite functions to this “escapist” aspect: they can tie the songs into the larger Indian cultural, social and historical context by relating the characters to the body of Indian traditions. Many times legendary couples are evoked to illustrate the emotions or settings of the characters: Rāma–Sītā, Rādhā–Kṛṣṇa, Hīr–Rānjhā or Śirin–Farhād all have their own special connotations, just like famous Sufi or Hindu saints, and through identifying with them, the story of the film can turn into the metaphor of a well-known body of literature. Often religious images appear in the lyrics or picturization of these songs which help place the current situation in the greater Indian cultural context in a compressed manner³⁵

Although the average – and especially Western – audiences would not necessarily think so, song sequences often have a very important role in the narrative structure. Songs can provide commentary on the story itself, they can contribute to plot developments and can be used in montage effects in order to conflate long-term temporal processes.³⁶ As

³² SKILLMAN 1986: 136.

³³ BHATTACHARJYA 2009:54.

³⁴ DUDRAH 2006: 48.

³⁵ DUDRAH 2006: 48.

³⁶ BOOTH 2000: 126.

different rules of temporality and spatiality apply to these sequences, these songs can often compress or suspend the narrative, bridging the temporal or spatial gaps in them.³⁷ This aspect is especially important if we consider the amount of constraints placed upon free expression of emotions. As already mentioned before, the role of the Central Board of Censors is very significant in this aspect, but the pressure exercised by the traditional and prude Indian society has to be taken into account as well, serving as a kind of implicit censorship. This comes to the fore especially in the case of romantic love: direct expression of love in movies (and in life) is not desired by either the authorities or the conservative layers of society, but as most Hindi films include romantic storylines, this contradiction has to be managed as well. Song sequences can play a crucial role in this respect: music scenes can visually and verbally express situations that otherwise would be impossible to portray for some reasons. Song sequences have a complex set of visual and verbal symbols which can convey the audiences all the necessary information in a very subtle manner. It is not surprising therefore that songs are most often used to depict amorous sentiments, which can range from declaration of attraction to the consummation of love. Filmmakers would have a hard time integrating these aspects into the main body of the film because of the official and social censorship, therefore they often delegate these narrative aspects to song sequences.³⁸ It often occurs that falling in love or declaration of mutual attraction does not happen through dialogues, but rather through song sequences. This also implies that without the songs, the story would contain unexplainable breaks of continuity and would be hard to understand.³⁹

Understandably therefore most of the songs are written in the verbal and visual language of love. The shifts among the various stages of a romantic relationship are most often marked by musical sequences, in which the lovers express their feelings through singing and dancing together in beautiful surroundings. Although the Censor Board is less restrictive with regards to the song sequences, signs of physical attraction must not be too blatant there either. Kissing is still off limits, except for the alternative of the “chaste kiss”, where after all indicators of an approaching kiss are depicted, the hero ends up kissing the heroine on her forehead or embraces her in a passionate manner. However, it is quite typical for these kinds of song picturizations to contain a large amount of

³⁷ BHATTACHARJYA 2009:58.

³⁸ SARRAZIN 2008: 200.

³⁹ MANUEL 1998:162.

sensuality, which are slightly toned down by the integration of these moves into choreography, but are still quite obvious in their nature, oftentimes even more explicit than a modest kiss would be.

A typical solution for the dilemmas of showing or hiding sexual tensions in the Bollywood films until the 1990s was the interpretative use of nature. Showing the couple until the penultimate decisive moment and then zooming on symbolic details of nature, such as flowing waterfalls, touching flowers or the endless skies could build up the necessary tension, but was still acceptable from the viewpoint of censors. Apart from this, the depiction of nature could also tie the romantic scenes to the Indian literary tradition of portraying the lovers in secluded, faraway places not bound by family and societal pressures.⁴⁰

Apart from the importance of visual representation and picturization of songs with regards to the narrative structure of the film, the aesthetic value of the songs should be discussed as well. Dudrah emphasizes that beauty and visual spectacle have historically been very important in Indian art forms, as is visible in the traditional images of heavily ornamented dancing girls, or the painted faces of classical dance performers. Apart from this, he adds that in the case of Bollywood love songs the luscious environments, spectacular costumes, and grandiose settings all convey the extent of love the characters feel for each other.

The unreal atmosphere of these videos is further reinforced by frequent changes in locations and costumes, which increases detachment from both the reality of the audiences and the context of the film. This implies that whatever is depicted in them is not happening even in the reality of the film. This factor can also help explain the lack of strictness from the part of the Board of Censors regarding suggestive or erotic content in song sequences.⁴¹

Despite the dominance of love songs, other song genres are also represented in cinema. Another clearly separable category is the already mentioned genre of the item song, which has its roots in the 1960s and 1970s Bollywood vamp numbers. The vamp song was centered around the figure of the Westernized woman performing an otherwise unrelated cabaret number for the hero and his friends. The popular genre is continued by the “item girls”, who are often professional dancers, models or celebrities featured in a

⁴⁰ CIOLFI 2012: 390.

⁴¹ DUDRAH 2006: 49-50.

cameo role within the respective movie. These “item girls” and their “item numbers” are usually not forwarding the plot or filling any narrative gaps, but are rather featured with the sole purpose of entertainment. The figure of the “item girl” is usually completely antithetical to that of the ideal heroine, and thus her inclusion can lead to the inclusion of some “guilty pleasure” in the film.⁴²

Other genres include patriotic songs, representations of philosophical or religious thoughts, character descriptions, images of nature and various seasons. Since the 1990s, when filmmakers started to target overseas Indian and non-Indian audiences, there has been a significant growth in the genre of songs depicting various Indian (and mostly Hindu) religious festivals and customs, such as *Holi*, *Dīvālī*, *Karvā Cauth* or weddings, which serve as significant attractions and sources of nostalgia for the non-resident Indian audiences. Nevertheless according to contemporary trends, the genre showing the most dynamic growth in popularity is that of party songs.⁴³ At times these party songs can be viewed as subgenres of the item song as well, but it is not uncommon that both an item song and a party song are included in the musical repertoire of a movie. These party songs are composed with the goal of having an afterlife in the sprouting urban nightlife culture of the metropolises and sometimes only their hybrid Hinglish language is the single feature setting them apart from similar Anglo-American songs and music videos.

IV. LANGUAGE OF FILM SONGS

Although till date no extensive research has been done on the question of the language of films and film songs, there is a basic logic identified by researchers. In spite of political pressure, most filmmakers are not conscious about linguistic purism, and usually do not follow any linguistic ideology during the creation of their films. They thrive to use a type of language instead that is understood by the maximum amount of people, so that unintelligibility does not hinder the popularity of the film. Period films, however, can pose exceptions to this pattern: in order to achieve a degree of historical accuracy, in films set in pre-Muslim historical times the language used usually excludes Perso-Arabic vocabulary, while period films depicting explicitly Muslim environment tend to use many

⁴² BHATTACHARJYA 2009: 64.

⁴³ SKILLMAN 1986: 141.

Urdu words and expressions. In the light of these observations I would argue with the scholars proposing that the expression “Hindi cinema” is in fact a misnomer because the language of Hindi cinema was Urdu from its inceptions.⁴⁴ In my opinion the traditional language of Bollywood should be termed Hindustani, in the sense that it makes use of vocabulary regardless of its origins: the only relevant factor regarding vocabulary is that it should be understood by the masses. According to my observations, when specific purist linguistic registers are used, either *śuddh* Hindi or *sāf* Urdu, they are supposed to convey extra stylistic information, such as setting up the historical environment, denoting the religious affiliation of the speaker, or ridiculing conservative language usage.

Another point supporting the lack of conscious linguistic ideology is the fact that filmmakers themselves refrain from committing their films to either linguistic register. There is a general absence of visual writing in films, which could be the only decisive factor in differentiating between the language used, since in the linguistic sense Hindi and Urdu are very similar, the most important feature setting them apart being the script used for writing them.⁴⁵ Even the movie titles are most often advertised and represented in Roman characters, and at the beginning of the movie, the title is usually presented simultaneously in *Devanāgarī*, *Nastalīq* and the Roman script, therefore it is impossible to decide upon the language used based on solid evidence.

Nevertheless if we consider the language of film songs, we find a certain dominance of the Urdu poetic language. The reasons behind this are to be found rooted in the history of the film industry. At the inception of Bombay filmmaking, most of the lyricists working in films were Urdu poets, who were in dire need of well-paying jobs. As the political rivalry between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League expanded to the linguistic terrain, and the question of Hindi and Urdu became a highly political matter, the social status of Urdu declined and Urdu writers and poets found themselves in an increasingly difficult environment. Therefore the possibility to have a job in the film industry became a relatively safe and well-paid option for Urdu poets. They did not have to face competition from Hindi poets because working in the film industry was not considered a respected position. The lyricists had to manage the constraints of the genre, did not have the artistic freedom of the poet, and they did not have accolades in store for them, as their names were not announced during the credits of the film. Change occurred in the 1950s

⁴⁴ DWYER 2006: 104.

⁴⁵ DWYER 2006: 103.

and 1960s with the coming of Sahir Ludhianvi, Kaifi Azmi, D. N. Madhok, Hasrat Jaipuri and their like, who not only managed to get acknowledged but by becoming successful and famous lyricist, could also elevate the social standing of the lyricist.⁴⁶

Following the footsteps of these pioneers, most contemporary lyricist still find Urdu the most suitable language to express the necessary emotional content. The giants of lyrics writing, Javed Akhtar and Gulzar were educated in Urdu, and use a linguistic style replete with Islamic references. Even though in recent years many new lyricists found their way into the industry, and some of them have started to explore new terrains, such as code mixing with English or the usage of regional dialects or languages, such as *Haryānvī* or *Panjābī*, even those who do not have a strong Urdu background try to copy the famous forerunners when it comes to the typical love songs, and thus inherently incorporate certain amount of the Urdu poetic tradition into their works. Rachel Dwyer argues that this is very important because it is one of the last public spaces available for Urdu in contemporary India, which is a point worth considering.⁴⁷

According to my observations, during the years a certain “division of labor” has appeared between the various linguistic registers of film songs. Urdu lyrics were usually associated with nostalgia and longing towards the past, emphatically so after the Partition of India and Pakistan. They were usually used when the feelings of loss had to be conveyed or an emotionally affective quality had to be created.⁴⁸ In addition to this, the popular film music style of the early Bollywood era, the light classical music also bore strong associations with Urdu poetry, as the traditional language of *ghazal* or *qawwālī* extensively used in films in these periods.⁴⁹ When folk or Hindu devotional environment must be represented, Hindi and its regional dialects are used. Westernized environment calls for the usage of English lyrics or at least a certain amount of code-mixing.

This observation holds true for film dialogues as well. Actors have been cast from urban environments with a standard Hindustani pronunciation from the beginnings of cinema. Therefore if characters deviate from this norm, that usually has a surplus meaning, denoting rural or working class origins. Dialects can also be used to give an additional sense of regional flavor or authenticity to the characters. Bakshi and Sarkar also mention the marketing possibilities in the background of using regional dialects:

⁴⁶ BEASTER-JONES 2014: 82.

⁴⁷ DWYER 2006: 108.

⁴⁸ GOPAL-MOORTI 2008: 23.

⁴⁹ SKILLMAN 1986: 143.

bringing in words from them might be a bid to increase familiarity of non-Hindi speakers with the song or the film and encourage a deeper emotional attachment to it among non-Hindi speakers.⁵⁰

Regional dialects, however, are often used for comic purposes as well, just like the purist usage of Hindi and Urdu is used to mock overly traditional characters.⁵¹ This comic feature used to be present with reference to English as well: originally English lyrics were used to depict a comic situation in which the speaker could not use English very well or used a pidgin type of language, and this was perceived as a source of entertainment.⁵² The political changes and shifts in society showed their impact on the sociolinguistic aspect of films as well: the 1970s and especially the 1990s marked significant changes in this respect, because educated characters started to use English or resort to code mixing in their dialogues, in a manner very much reminiscent of their real life counterparts.⁵³ This change was reflected in the songs as well: although it is still not common to have songs entirely in English, the code mixing of English and Hindi and the usage of “Hinglish” is in the process of gaining more prominence and popularity, especially in connection with the urban youth. Typical themes invoking usage of Hinglish lyrics are party culture and the depiction of explicitly erotic content,⁵⁴ which can be attributed to the lack of adequate Hindi vocabulary for the description of the youth culture, but also the alienating aspect of using the foreign language to depict the foreign influence in Indian culture.

V. CONCLUSION

Having traced the historical developments, genres, functions and linguistic styles typical of Hindi film song lyrics we can deduct that many of these features are highly intertwined and could not be understood one by one, similarly as Hindi films would be hard to interpret without the Hindi film songs. It is important to note, however, that the change in the film music industry is going on with an accelerated speed, and will probably have a very profound impact on the nature of the film song. The increasing usage of the voice-

⁵⁰ BAKSHI-SARKAR 2015: 152.

⁵¹ DWYER 2006: 105.

⁵² VISHWAMOHAN 2011: 21.

⁵³ DWYER 2006: 105.

⁵⁴ VISHWAMOHAN 2011: 23.

over technique and the marginalization of the traditional lip-synch technique is on the one hand making Bollywood films more realistic and easier to digest for young overseas audiences, therefore making films more rentable, but on the other hand might lead to the demise of a very entertaining and intriguing feature of Hindi cinema.

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